DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 009 PS 019 697

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TITLE Change in Parental Attitudes Toward Child-Rearing over Time.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, MD.
PUB DATE 20 Apr 91
CONTRACT NICHHHD-HD-23261-04
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Seattle, WA, April 18-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *Attitude Change; *Child Rearing; Emotional Experience; Longitudinal Studies; *Parent Attitudes; *Sex Differences; Toddlers
IDENTIFIERS Encouragement; Independent Behavior

ABSTRACT

The Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire, which assesses parental warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness, and aggravation, was completed by 92 mothers and fathers when their child was 20, 26, and 32 months old. Analyses assessed covariation between parents across time points. Also assessed were the possibilities that: (1) parents differed according to sex of child; (2) mothers and fathers differed at each age of the child; and (3) parents' scores differed across the ages of the child. Results indicated that mothers reported more warmth, more encouragement of independence, and less strictness. Parents increased their emphasis on independence as the child grew older. Parental aggravation showed a complex relationship based on the parent, and the child's gender and age. When the child was 20 to 32 months old, parents increasingly covaried on their reported attitudes toward strictness and aggravation. Differences between mothers and fathers generally was related to the child's gender in such a way that mothers appeared to have more socialization demands for girls, and fathers more socialization demands for boys. (Author/RH)

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Change in Parental Attitudes Toward Child-rearing Over Time

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Note: This paper was presented at the Society for Research in Child Development on Saturday, April 20, 1991 in Seattle, Washington.

Acknowledgments: The first author thanks the Office of Graduate Studies and the Computation Center at the University of Texas at Austin for providing partial support to present this paper. This research was funded through grant HD23261-04 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to the second author.

PS 019697

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Abstract

In this study, the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire measuring parental warmth, encouraging independence, strictness and aggravation was answered by 92 mothers and fathers at three timepoints: when their child was 20, 26 and 32 months old. Pearson correlations assessed covariation between parents across timepoints. Next, repeated-measures MANOVAs tested whether: (1) parents differed if their child was a girl or boy (2) mothers and fathers differ at each age and (3) if parents' scores change across ages.

Results indicate that mothers, compared to fathers, report: more warmth, more encouraging independence and less strictness. In addition, parents show increasing emphasis on independence as the child grows older. Parental aggravation shows a complex relationship based on the parent, child's gender, and child's age. Finally, parents increasingly covary on their reported attitudes toward strictness and aggravation from 20 to 32 months.

Change in Parental Attitudes Toward Child-rearing Over Time

Change and stability in parental ideas are important to understanding parental cognition and potentially altering dysfunctional parental practices (Goodnow, 1988). Although attitudes are loosely defined at affective evaluations, parental child-rearing attitudes (hereafter referred to as parental attitudes) have included parents' self-perceptions, beliefs, behavioral intentions and evaluations. Parental attitudes are traditionally characterized as stable and trait-like (Holden & Edwards, 1989). However, recent theoretical development suggests parents construct and alter their parental attitudes in response to events in the parent-child and parent-parent relationships (Goodnow, 1988; Sigel, 1985).

Past research on change in parental childrearing attitudes has shown little change in parental child-rearing practices (McNally, Eisenberg & Harris, 1991). Child-rearing practice are measured by items that largely overlap the content of parental attitudes. In a study of 32 mothers (16 girls and 16 boys), McNally et al. (1991) found that over time when these children were 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14 and 15-16 years of age, mothers showed linear trends toward greater emphasis on control and achievement with no change in most domains. However, Maccoby (1984) notes that

change in parental ideas is most likely with rapid developmental changes children's behavior found in very young children.

In a study of 65 mother and 42 fathers who responded to the Child Rearing Practices Report when their child was 3 and 12-years-old, Roberts. Block & Block (1984) found mean differences for 32% (29/91) of the items for mothers and 28% (28/91) for fathers. However, they found differences in which items changed over time depending on parents' and children's gender. By exploring change in parental attitudes using very young boys and girls, both parents and more than two timepoints, this study will advance knowledge of parental cognitive adaptation to their children's development.

HYPOTHESES

Overall, this study tests between family differences based on whether the target child is a boy or girl; and within family differences, based on whether mothers or fathers differ and whether parents' scores change across children's ages (20, 26 and 32 months).

Hypothesis 1: Although past research (e.g., Roberts et al., 1984), has shown differences by parents' and children's gender, no clear pattern emerged. In this study, if differences between mothers and fathers appear,

they will likely be moderated by the gender of their child although no specific predictions are made.

Hypothesis 2: If change in parental child-rearing attitudes may be expected as a consequence of developmental change in the child's behavior, then those parental child-rearing attitudes most related to children's behavior, strictness, encouraging independence and aggravation will show the greatest change over time.

Hypothesis 3: Similarly, if the parent-parent relationship affects parental child-rearing attitudes through increased parental communication over time, leading to greater convergence in the attitudes, then strictness, encouraging independence will show the greatest change.

METHOD

To answer these questions, data were collected as part of the Austin Longitudinal Project, a 3-year study of parents and children. Each parent completed the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984), at three timepoints: within one month of when their child was 20, 26, and 32 months old. Each parent answered the questionnaire independently in their home. The Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire comprises 51 items cluster-analyzed into 4

scales: warmth, encouraging independence, strictness and aggravation (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984). Items were scored on 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Several items were reversed to avoid response sets. Table 1 shows selected items from each scale with corresponding coefficient alphas measuring the internal consistency for all scale items. Alphas show moderate consistency over time.

ANALYSIS

First, Pearson correlations tested covariation between parents across ages. Second, using the family as the unit of analysis (see Ball, McKenry & Price-Bonham, 1983), encouraging independence, strictness, warmth and aggravation were analyzed separately using a repeated-measures MANOVA (2 X 2 X 3) to test for differences between: (1) child's gender (girls or boys), a between-subjects factor, (2) parent (mother or father), and (3) children's age (20, 26 or 32 months), both within subject factors. For each MANOVA, a full factorial model tests each main effect and all interactions.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlations between mothers and fathers. Parental strictness shows the highest covariation at each age with a trend

toward increased covariation between mothers and fathers across ages (at 20 months: $r(46) = .21$, $p < .10$; at 26 months: $r(46) = .32$, $p < .05$,; and at 32 months: $r(46) = .45$, $p < .001$). Examination of off-diagonal correlations indicates mothers scores at earlier ages are more strongly, positively related to father's scores at later ages. For aggravation, a moderate trend for covariation was found at each age. However, no off-diagonal correlations were found from 20 to 26 months but both mothers' and fathers' aggravation at 20 months and 26 months predicts their partner's aggravation at 32 months. This pattern of covariation suggests mothers' and fathers' aggravation become interdependent but over a longer period of time and to a lesser degree than interdependence for strictness.

Table 3 presents F values and significance levels for encouraging independence, strictness, warmth and aggravation. Each significant main effect and interaction is graphed in Figure 1 through Figure 4 that follow.

Figure 1 shows significant main effects for parent and child's age for encouraging independence. Mothers were more likely to encourage independence than fathers; and both parents increased their encouragement from 20 to 32 months. Paired T-tests showed that compared to fathers, mothers encouraged more independence at 20 months

[t(46)=2.08, p <. 05] and 26 months [t(46)=2.64, p <. 05].

Figure 2 shows the main effect for strictness (fathers are more strict) and the two-way interaction between parent and child's gender and parent indicating fathers are more strict than mothers with boys but not girls. Paired T-tests showed that, compared to mothers, fathers were more strict at 26 months [t(46)=-1.74, p <. 10] and 32 months [t(46)=-2.39, p <. 05].

Figure 3 shows both the main effect and interaction for warmth. Mothers were warmer than fathers but this difference occurs only for boys. Paired T-tests showed that, compared to fathers, mothers reported more warmth at 20 months [t(46)=2.82, p <. 01] and 26 months [t(46)=1.72, p <. 10].

Figure 4 shows a complex relationship between mothers' and father's aggravation depending on the child's age and gender. Both parents report more aggravation with girls than boys except at 20 months (fathers' reports are equivalent). Mothers report greater aggravation at 26 months with a similar increase for girls and boys. From 26 to 32 months, mothers sharply diverge depending on whether their child is a boy or girl. For girls, mothers' aggravation continues to increase while for boys it decreases. In contrast, fathers report similar aggravation at 20 months for girls and boys,

greater aggravation with girls at 26 months and less aggravation with girls at 32 months. For boys, fathers report less aggravation at 26 months and a slight trend to more aggravation at 32 months.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results show both change and stability in parental attitudes toward childrearing from when children are 20 to 32 months of age. As predicted, both parents increasingly report greater encouragement of independence for their child over time. Mothers encouraged greater independence than fathers when target children were 20 and 26-months-old but not at 32-months-old, perhaps due to their role as primary agents of socialization with very young toddlers. No effect was found for child's gender.

However for other parental attitudes, differences between parents were moderated by child's gender. Fathers were more strict than mothers but only for boys. Mothers are actually less strict with boys than girls, perhaps because they have greater expectations for cooperation and socially appropriate behavior with girls. Mothers were significantly warmer than fathers but only to boys; fathers were nearly as warm with girls as mothers. Fathers may have higher expectations for boys than mothers do, so are

more strict and less warm.

Although fathers are significantly less warm with boys, they report less aggravation with boys then mothers who report increasing aggravation with girls. Mothers may have a strong expectation for girls to be more socialized and cooperative at 32 months leading to this linear trend. When their toddlers are 20 months old, fathers report as much aggravation as mothers, but their aggravation with boys drops when boys are 26 months old, and their aggravation with girls drops when girls are 32 months old. The different pattern for mothers and fathers may be due to differences in parental caregiving roles. Mothers are generally more involved in socializing and guiding toddlers toward appropriate behavior, whereas fathers become increasingly involved in playful interaction over the toddler period, especially for boys (Clarke-Stewart, 1980). Thus fathers' aggravation may decrease as playful interaction increases while mothers may find the increased autonomy and negativism of their toddler girls to be unexpected and difficult.

In conclusion, our findings indicate change over time in parent's increasing encouragement of independence and variation in the pattern of parental aggravation. Differences between mothers and fathers generally

interact with their child's gender such that mother appear to place more socialization demands for girls while fathers act similarly for boys. To better understand patterns of change, future research needs to discriminate more carefully the different aspects of parental attitudes being measured.

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Table 1. PACR Scales With Representative Items and Coefficient Alphas Assessed at Each Measurement

Scale	Number of Items	Coefficient Alpha 20 months	26 months (n=92)	32 months
Encourages Independence	9	.58	.62	.62
Strictness	12	.61	.69	.59
Warmth	8	.62	.53	.58
Aggravation	18	.68	.68	.71

Sample Items

Encourages Independence

I encourage my child to express anger as well as pleasant feelings.

Strictness

I feel it is never too early to start teaching a child to obey commands.

Warmth

I find some of my greatest satisfactions in my child.

Aggravation

I find that taking care of a young child is much more work than pleasure.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Between Mothers and Fathers for Each Parental Attitude Toward Child-Rearing Domain

		MOTHER		
		20 months	26 months	32 months
FATHER	**Independence**			
	20 months	-.08	-.20+	-.02
	26 months	-.03	-.25*	-.13
	32 months	.06	.01	.07
	Strictness			
	20 months	.21+	.22+	.20+
	26 months	.29*	.32*	.23+
	32 months	.33*	.45***	.45***
	Warmth			
	20 months	-.06	-.19+	-.16
	26 months	.02	-.07	.14
	32 months	-.01	.02	.00
	Aggravation			
	20 months	.13	.16	.23*
	26 months	.16	.26*	.40**
	32 months	.27*	.26*	.23+

NOTE: n=46
+ = p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

Table 3. F Values and Significance Levels Based On Full Factorial Model for Child's Gender, Parent and Child's Age

Effect	Parental Attitude Toward Child–Rearing			
	Encourages Independence	Strictness	Warmth	Aggravation
Child's gender	1.65	.04	.30	1.90
Parent	5.46*	7.06*	5.66*	.09
Child's age	4.97*	.58	.17	1.05
Child's gender X Parent	1.87	5.59*	2.86*	.38
Child's gender X Child's Age	.65	2.18	.14	2.29
Parent X Child's Age	1.19	.18	.74	2.30
Child's gender X Parent X Child's Age	.61	.22	.93	2.83*

NOTE: Subjects included 25 girls and 21 boys
+ = p <.10, * = p <.05

Figure 1. Mothers' and Fathers' Encouraging Independence by Age of Child

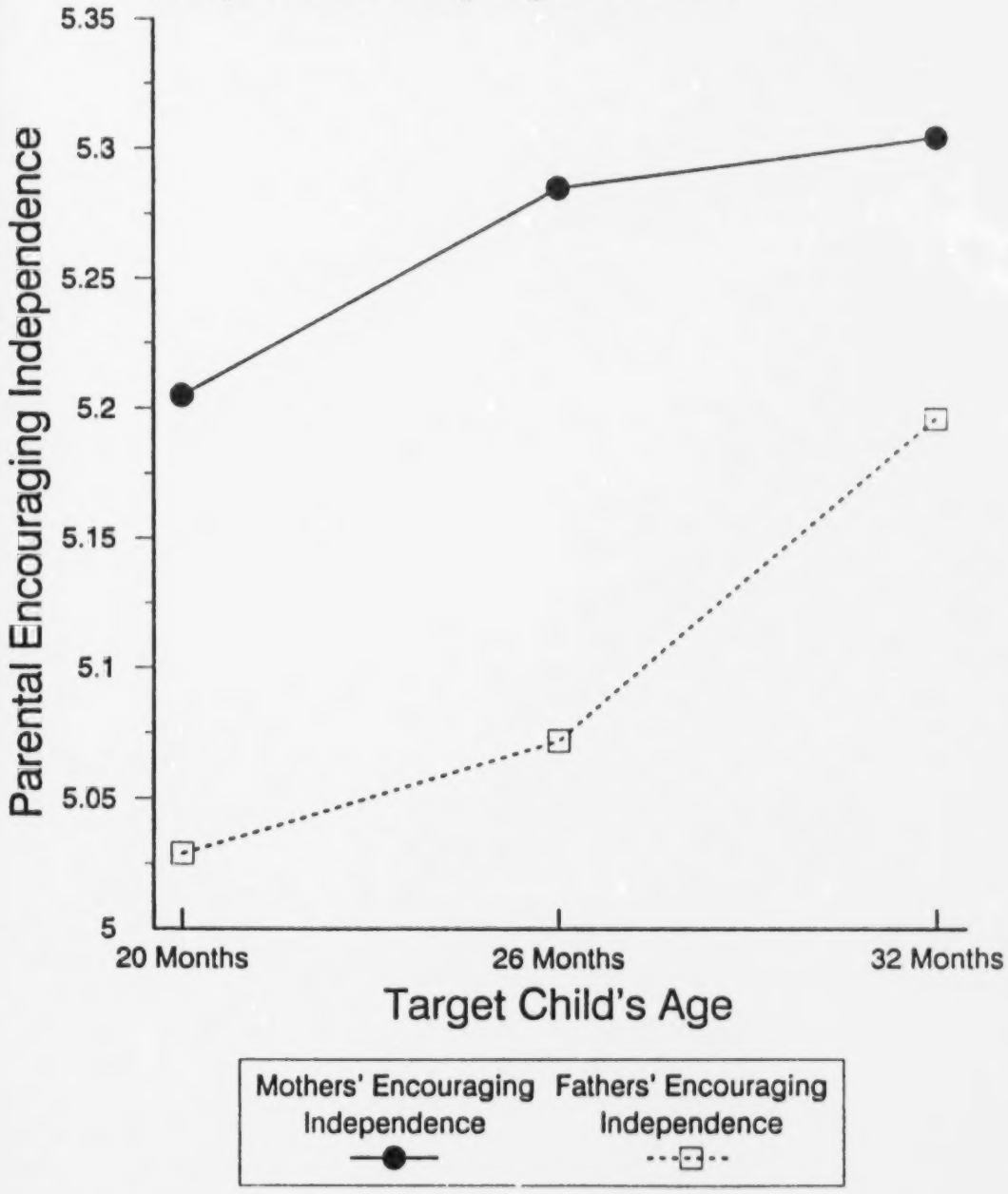

Figure 3: Mothers' and Fathers' Warmth by Child's Gender

Figure 4. Mothers' and Fathers' Aggravation by Child's Gender and Age